

Classic trip

Famous train line pairs luxurious amenities with unique views of Southeast Asia, writes Vicki Williams

Crime writer Agatha Christie once said, "trains are wonderful ... to travel by train is to see nature and human beings, towns ... and rivers – in fact, to see life".

This quote is one of the most used by train companies and travel journalists when trying to bring in business or readers, and for good reason: it's true.

What the late Christie, author of *Murder on the Orient Express*, didn't say was that there was a big difference between seeing life pass by while on a crowded city train and watching it from the observation car of a luxury train as you sip Champagne, bathed in the golden glow of a picture-perfect sunset, before partaking in a sumptuous four-course repast in an elegant dining car.

The latter is what travellers can expect when taking a trip on the Eastern and Oriental Express train,



including its Classic Journey from Singapore to Bangkok, a relaxing three-day/two-night trip. Stepping back in time to the golden era of train travel begins with check-in at the historic Raffles Singapore hotel.

Once on board, guests are shown to their cabin by a carriage steward who is on 24-hour call. Cabins come in three categories: pullman, state and presidential. While cabin size

might be an issue for some, the interiors are nevertheless impressive – wood, cherry and elm burr; panelled walls; the canvas for decorative hand-cut marquetry and inlays; fine metal detailing; period lighting; hand-tufted carpet and large windows.

The glamorous ambience extends to dining – especially in the evenings, when a jacket and tie is required for men. The refined dining cars have an Old World European feel, with exquisite table settings and crystalware, making the experience just as important as the destination.

The food is top-notch, with dishes having a European focus with Asian influences, in a nod to the countries being travelled through.

Before or after dinner, guests can enjoy cocktails in the bar car, while listening to the resident pianist, who creates a party atmosphere. Other onboard entertainment includes a reading and games room,



The observation deck is a popular spot on the Eastern and Oriental Express.

a Chinese astrologer, foot massage and cultural performances, such as traditional Thai dancing.

There is also the observation car with its own bar and partially open outdoor area, perfect for sundowners or an early morning coffee. It also provides the best vantage point for taking photos of the stunning scenery – more than 2,000km worth.

From palm and banana plantations and verdant rice fields as far as the eye can see, to the mist of the highlands or the limestone

formations rising from the horizon, the views from the train are unparalleled. Two guided excursions away from the train allow for a closer look at some landmarks.

Travellers can explore George Town, Penang – a Unesco-listed city – on foot or by rickshaw, with a focus on the Street of Harmony, with its temples, street food and colonial architecture. They can also embark on a tranquil river cruise on the River Kwai, which includes a visit to the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre.



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